

Mine Hill School
Off Almaden Road, New Almaden Quicksilver
Mine County Park
New Almaden
Santa Clara County
California

HABS No. CA-1125

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20043

MINE HILL SCHOOL

Location: New Almaden Quicksilver Mine Park, off Almaden Road
Almaden, CA.

USGS Santa Teresa Hills Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 10.603010.4115190.

Present Owner: County of Santa Clara

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: None

Significance: Begun in the 1860s this redwood structure was the first school built to accomodate the children of workers at the New Almaden Quicksilver Mine (HABS No. CA-114) and was used as such until 1910. It was the largest of three schools built by the Mine Company and is the only one still standing. Enlarged several times, its final form contained decorative cornice brackets and window head moldings and was situated on a terraced and landscaped site, making it, with the possible exception of the churches formerly located there, the most architecturally sophisticated structure on the hill.

Presently it is one of the only three structures remaining on the Mine Hill site which date to the nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1860. A negative dated "1862" shows the school building before later additions had been completed.
2. Original and subsequent owners:

The building is located in the New Almaden Quicksilver Mine County Park, parcels 1, 2, and 9 as shown on the parcel map filed in the County Recorder's Office on June 18, 1973, in Book 325 of maps, pages 1-9 inclusive, and more particularly recorded as follows:

1850 The site was owned by Barron, Forbes Company, New Almaden Mining Company.

- 1863 Barron, Forbes Company sold the property to the Quicksilver Mining Company.
 - 1915 The Quicksilver Mining company sold the property to George Sexton, and the name was changed to the New Idria Company.
 - 1925 The property was transferred through mortgage foreclosure to Lake Almaden Properties Company. Thomas Coch acted as agent for the California Title Company.
 - 1927 Lake Almaden Properties Company sold the property to David Black.
 - 1944 David Black sold the property to Christiani Wineries.
 - 1949 Christiani Brothers sold the property to Robert Gray. (The site was leased to the New Almaden Corporation during 1940-46).
 - 1951 Deed, February 24, 1951, recorded in Book 3437, page 455. Robert G. and Florence L. Gray sold the property to Norman J. Pope and Arthur Cooper.
 - 1968 Assignments of Ren, November 21, 1968. Norman J. and Love Brown Pope granted lease to Citizens Federal Savings and Loan Association.
3. Original plans and construction: Reputedly the school was principally funded by Ralph Lowe, operator of the Quicksilver Mine Company Store located southwest of the school site on Mine Hill. He reportedly collected \$3,000 for its construction (McMurry Papers, note in photo album #1). The building never had electricity or a central heating system during its life as a school, having been lit by coal oil lamps and heated by a wood-burning stove (Gillmeister interview).

Of the three schools — another one was at the Hacienda Village, and the third, a preparatory school for the other two public schools, was at the Mexican Camp — (see HABS CA-114 New Almaden Quicksilver Mine) — operating during the Quicksilver Mining Company's most productive years, "The Mine Hill School was most favored by Company Manager James Randol" (Innis, "Captain James Harry's Administration"). All three were patronized only by the children of the mine employees, but Mine Hill had the largest attendance and the best teachers and featured "artistically laid out gardens terraced into the hillside" at the east (Innis, "Harry's Administration" p. 13"). As of 1885, the Mine Hill School had four teachers compared to the Hacienda district's two, and apparently had the lion's share of the 253 pupils then enrolled (Contested election, Jennings testimony, p. 16, Prof. G.E. Lighthall's testimony, p. 57).

4. Alterations and additions:

The school first appeared as a rectangular six-bay-long structure facing east. (See HABS photocopy). The first addition consisted of symmetrical wings three bays wide, one on the north and one on the south, at the west end of the building. (see HABS photocopy).

A square truncated tower capped with an ornamental wooden railing marked the crossing. A flag pole sprang from the center of the crossing. Windowless cloak rooms flanking the east entry may have been added at this time as well. The new windows on the north and south wings had ornamental moldings absent from the original severely utilitarian structure.

A second addition was made by extending the rear or west end of the building about 20 feet back into the hillside, thereby making the structure into more or less of a Greek cross in plan. These first two additions were completed before 1885 (see HABS Photocopies), when views of the cross-shaped school were submitted in court proceedings to investigate charges of improper election proceedings and coercive living conditions at the mine. Continuous redwood moldings, fascia boarding, and brackets run around all four arms of the new composition. All materials, including square-headed nails, are identical to those of the earlier T-shaped form of the school (Gillmeister interview) and suggest that the addition may have been made by the same builders within a few years of the building of the T-shaped structure, probably in the late 1860s or 1870s. Upon a re-roofing between 1885 and 1923, the tower and flagpole were removed (Gillmeister interview).

Since its abandonment in 1910 (Innis, "Harry's Administration"), the structure doubtlessly suffered from vandalism, but there is no apparent evidence of further systematic alteration until the advent of the Civilian Conservation Corps, which utilized the school as a mess hall in the 1930s (Picket, NARS Record Group #407). The Corps piped in running water and dug a septic tank at the southeast corner. Also on the southeast, they laid a path with brick and timber steps (Gillmeister interview).

The Corps made three additions: The shed-like extension at the northwest, the lean-to extension to the south, removed in 1966 (Gillmeister interview), and the extensive bake shop to the north, a partially collapsed structure. The Corps made interior alterations as well. A concrete slab floor supporting modern kitchen facilities — consisting of sink, stove and counter — was placed at the west. The wood-burning stove on the south wall of this kitchen area was apparently removed at the same time. The Corps also covered the roof as well as parts of the interior walls with tarpaper (Gillmeister interview, see, generally, NARS CCC file Cards).

Since the early 1940s, the school has been vacant and vandalized again. The east entry porch steps and the entire south wall of the south wing are missing. The Corps' shed addition on the same wall had been removed circa 1966 by Park Ranger Gillmeister, who subsequently, in August 1976, placed concrete footings under the flooring of this wing, to help stabilize the structure whose redwood mudsill foundations are also deteriorating.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Structure:

To understand the relationship of the school to the broader operations of the quicksilver mining operation, see "New Almaden Quicksilver Mine," HABS No. CA-114.

C. Sources of Information:

NB: see "New Almaden Quicksilver Mine" HABS No. CA-114 for more extensive bibliographic information.

1. Old Views/Photographs:

- a. Stereograph view ca. 1860 of south and west elevations of original six by one-bay structure. See photocopy.
- b. View dated 1862 showing north and west elevations after first addition. See photocopy.
- c. View ca. 1885, showing west flank after second addition. See photocopy.
- d. View ca. 1885 of south elevation, showing entry porch and landscaping features now missing. See photocopy.
- e. Additional undated views of school while in use (before 1910) showing details of landscaping and east porch are in the possession of Mrs. Constance B. Perham, New Almaden Museum, 21570 Almaden Road, New Almaden, CA, Mr. Henry Gillmeister, 1411 El Solvo, Campbell, CA, and in the Winn-Bulmore and McMurphy sections of the New Almaden Mine Collection, Box 270, Bender Room, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

2. Drawings: None known.

3. Primary and unpublished sources:

+ Denotes material at New Almaden Museum, 21570 Almaden Road, New Almaden, CA.

* Denotes material at San Jose Historical Museum, 635
Phelan Avenue, San Jose, CA.

** Denotes material at Stanford University Bender Room,
Special Collections, Palo Alto, CA.

A. Manuscripts and Reports:

1. Annual Reports, Quicksilver Mining Co. 1865-1912. +**
2. Bulmore, Lawrence, compilation of title changes, miscellaneous papers, New Almaden collection.*
3. Miscellaneous correspondence 1866-1912, containing letters of Butterworth and Randol, Boxes #4-14. New Almaden Collection, Box 270. Stanford.**
4. Innis, A. C., "New Almaden Fifty Years Ago" a collection of papers edited by Douglas M. Perham.+
5. Notecards of P. S. "Jimmie" Schneider relating to Butterworth and Randol Correspondence.**
6. Notes, McMurtry Papers, New Almaden Mine Collection JB Box 270, Bender Room, Stanford University.**
7. Pinkett, Harold, T. compiler, Preliminary Inventory #11 of the records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, National Archives, Washington, D.C. 1948 and Associated Record Group #407.+
8. Transcript of Manager's Letterbook, Quicksilver Mining Company, January 6, 1864 - October 8, 1866.+

B. Deed Books: County Recorders Office, 70 West Redding Street,
San Jose, CA.

C. Interview: 7/14/77 with retired county Park Ranger Henry Gillmeister who has been familiar with school since 1923 concerning C.C.C. alterations and his own efforts at stabilization and restoration at New Almaden Museum. His residence is 1411 El Solvol, Cambell, CA.

4. Secondary and published sources (See key above):

"A contested Election in California:

Hon. C.N. Felton. Testimony of Qualified Electors and
Legal Voters of Almaden." Reprinted from the San Jose
Daily Mercury Santa Clara County, CA., 1887.

Johnson, Kenneth. The New Almaden Quicksilver Mine.
Georgetown, CA. Talisman Press, 1963.+

Lanyon, Milton and Lawrence Bulmore. Cinnabar Hills - The Quicksilver Days of New Almaden - Los Gatos, CA: Village Printers
for Lanyon and Bulmore, 1967.+

5. Sources still to be checked:

- a. The Stanford Collection** contains pressbooks and managerial correspondence for the Quicksilver Mining Co. and its successors beginning in 1866. Further references to school construction or alteration may well be contained therein.

The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkely. According to the Curatrice of the New Almaden Museum, Mrs. Constance Perham, they may have some unsorted papers relating to the mine in the basement.

The Sourisseau Academy Library located atop the San Jose State University Library, South and 7th Street San Jose, CA., also has a set of the photographs of the mine properties.

Prepared by: Carolyn Mann
Project Historian
National Park Service
July 1977

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The old Mine Hill School is a picturesque fragment of a typical mid-nineteenth century frame school house. Many of the remaining features including the heavy cornice brackets and door and window moldings are handsome.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The original building is T-shaped with the main block measuring 37' x 56' and the front entrance block 12' x 28'. A rear addition measures 25' x 30'. To the north of the main block is a series of shed-roofed frame additions now partly in ruins. To the south a frame addition was recently removed with the wood remaining on the site.

2. Foundations: The building rests on mudsills.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are of 2 x 4 frame construction with horizontal boarding nailed to the exterior. Early photographs indicate that the building was originally painted, but very little paint of any era remains.
4. Structural system, framing: The 2 x 4 frame walls support the trussed roofs. The front entrance block has a series of trusses running parallel to the front wall and intersecting at right angles with the truss system of the main central block. The rear addition has trusses which run parallel with the front of the building. This latter roof is built over portions of the completed roof of the original portion.
5. Porches: There are only fragments of an original porch on the front of the building. Parts of the front steps remain, and the position of two engaged columns which held the rear end of the porch roof can be determined by lines visible beside the entrance door.
6. Chimneys: There is a large brick flue encased in siding which rises through the southeast corner of room 102 and terminates in a brick chimney. This chimney was once higher but now rises only to about the level of the roof ridge. Another brick flue is located at the northwest corner of room 101.
7. Openings: A great many of the openings in this building have been altered.
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door consists of an opening 8' wide and 12' high in which there is a large lower portion now filled with a crudely constructed single door and side panels but which originally probably held a set of double doors and a transom light now boarded up. The transom can be seen from behind and consists of three lights.

The opening for the doorway and transom is framed by an outer flat board and an inner recessed heavy compound molding. There are currently doors in the north front and south rear of the main block, but the remains of trim on both indicate that they were originally windows. There is also a door, probably recent, on the south side of the main block's rear wall.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The northeast window on the front of the entrance block is probably the best preserved window, although it is missing its sash. The other southeast window on the front, now boarded up, was probably similar, as were the four windows on the east and west walls of the main block. All of these are missing trim, and the southeast and northwest windows of the main block have been altered in size.

On the rear addition there were apparently two windows each on the north and south elevations similar to those on the original portion of the building. None of these are intact. On the south elevation the west window has been cut down in size and the east window turned into a door. On the north facade the west window has been cut down in size, and the east window has been removed. In each case shadows from the old window moldings remain, and the original windows are visible in an old photograph of the building.

On the west elevation of the rear addition there are two windows which are apparently recent, since they are not visible in old photographs, and the construction resembles the altered windows elsewhere on this addition. There are also circular ventilators in the east, west and north gables. The south gable has had the exterior boarding removed, so there is no trace of this window.

8. Roof: The roof of the main block is a simple gable with the ridge running from north to south. This roof intersects at right angles with the roof of the entrance block whose ridge line is at the roof of the entrance block whose ridge line is at the same height. The roof of the rear addition is a gable roof with the ridge running east to west but lower than that of the main roof. This roof was constructed over part of the completed roof of the main block. All of the roof surfaces are covered with wooden shingles approximately 18" long exposed 4" to the weather.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The front block consists of a vestibule (room 105) and two flanking rooms (104, 106). The vestibule opens by a door into a main south room (107) and by another door into the main north room (103) with a kitchen (102) adjacent. The rear addition (101) consists of a single large room accessible from 107 by a doorway. The floor of the rear addition is now about 3' higher than the floor of the main block, but an earlier floor is still extant under the current floor.
2. Stairways: There is one set of two steps at the rear of the main block leading to the door to the exterior, and there must have been other steps in this room leading up to the rear addition.
3. Flooring: The flooring in room 101 is soft wood of a width varying from 4" to 8". Room 103 has 3" flooring, while rooms 104, 105, 106 and 107 have 2" flooring. A concrete floor has been laid over the wooden floor in room 102.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Most of the halls are finished with two inch tongue-and-groove boarding. There is a wide band of this boarding missing on many of the walls, perhaps indicating the presence of blackboards. The ceiling of rooms 102-107 are made of 2" wide tongue-and-groove boards. In 101 the roof structure is exposed.
5. Doorways and doors: There are no interior doors left, but what appears to be the original molded trim is intact on the inside of the front entrance door and in several other openings.
6. Lighting: Apparently the only indication of lighting is the pipe in the ceiling visible in room 104.
7. Heating: The enclosed flue in room 102 has holes for individual stoves in rooms 102 and 107. There is a brick flue in the northwest corner of room 101 which probably accomodated a stove to heat the back room.

C. Site:

1. General setting and orientation:

The building sits on a hillside near the top of Mine Hill and faces south. Several excellent specimens of olive, fir, lime oak and cypress trees stand in front of the building.

Prepared by: Robert Bruegmann
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1977

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara. The 1977 summer project, the first year of a four-year recording project in Santa Clara County, was completed under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; Kenneth L. Anderson, Jr., Principal Architect; and Robert Bruegmann, Project Supervisor (University of Pennsylvania); with Jack Schafer, Architectural Foreman (University of Cincinnati); Carolyn Hamm, Historian (Duke University); and student architects Tim Allenbrook (Rhode Island School of Design), Barbara Hendricks (University of Texas), and Jeff Lees (University of Oklahoma), at the HABS Field Office in Saratoga, California. The drawings were edited in the HABS Washington Office in the summer of 1979 by architect David T. Marsh. The historical and architectural data were edited during the summer of 1979 by Jan Cigliano, an architectural historian on the HABS staff at the 1979 Field Office in Santa Clara, California.